

USDA - APHIS

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC COMMENTS RECEIVED DURING THE
NATIONAL ANIMAL ID PROGRAM LISTENING SESSION

MONDAY, AUGUST 30, 2004

FOX VALLEY TECHNICAL COLLEGE
APPLETON, WISCONSIN
1:00 P.M.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BILL HAWKS, UNDER SECRETARY, MARKETING AND REGULATORY PROGRAMS

DR. VALERIE RAGAN, ASSISTANT DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR

MARY THORNHILL, MODERATOR

(The meeting began at 1:05 p.m. and opening comments were made by Mr. Bill Hawks and Dr. Valerie Ragan.)

MS. THORNHILL: Okay. We're ready to start with the comments now.

Our first five speakers are Representative Barb Gronemus, Jim Holte, Ken Olson, Barbara Kowalczyk, and John Peck.

REP. GRONEMUS: I'm representative Barb Gronemus, and thank you for inviting us to the meeting and especially to Congressman Green. I was looking forward to seeing him today but he doesn't happen to be here.

The animal premise identification program is one that I finally got cooperation of all of the different farm organizations to agree to, and one of the very important things that we all agreed to is that the funding mechanism had to be from either the federal or the state government. There's no way that a consumer can demand--and if there is going to be a food safety issue, which I assume that that's generally the importance of the whole concept, then I think the consumer must be involved in paying for it. Farmers cannot afford it, and we need to make sure that as the agencies themselves put their programs together, that they don't try to sneak in funding through a budget amendment. And so that's something that we as legislators need to be watching out for.

I talked to my veterinarians and to my farmers about this issue over the last few weeks, because I think it's a very important issue and a national issue that needs to be addressed. We talked about such things as, what happens with the movement of animals, and how many times does an animal move, and then

the different types of animals. I have a large poultry industry in my area, so my poultry industry is going to be one that will do things in blocks or numbers rather than individual numbers. It just simply won't work otherwise. The other issue is the processors and how will the processors be involved in this whole issue?

The other thing that I think is important is that, if they lose tags, if they implement tags, tags are oftentimes either removed or they lose them, and I think that's an issue. I'd also talked to a farmer who believes that freeze branding would be one way of identifying the animals, and that is something that he can do at a reasonable cost. And I think the cost factor will come into play.

The other is microchipping of the animals, and how is this going to work? One thing that Secretary Veneman didn't seem to understand, and I think it's gonna cause a problem, is that her interpretation of what a downer animal was, and that a downer animal, as far as health is concerned, is not going to be counted when we're talking about animals, because farmers are going to either utilize that animal or they're gonna dump it. The other thing that I think is important is that--this is not gonna happen overnight, and that we all need to work together, and legislatively I think you need to make sure that we get a hold of those legislators that are interested and will work toward a good result.

MS. THORNHILL: Thank you. Jim Holte.

MR. HOLTE: On behalf of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation, I'm pleased to provide comments on the National Animal ID Program. My name is Jim Holte, a beef and calf grain producer and former dairy farmer near Eau Claire. I serve on the Wisconsin Farm Bureau board of directors, represent the Wisconsin Farm Bureau and the Wisconsin Livestock ID Consortium and I am past president of the Wisconsin Beef Council.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports a National Animal Identification Program as part of Wisconsin's leadership in developing a model for the entire country to use for animal ID. Our policy specifically states we believe food safety, animal health, and bio-security are interstate issues that affect the entire country. We support collaborative efforts of industry and governmental animal health officials to develop a national ID system for the livestock.

We strongly encourage Wisconsin to support programs that are national in scope. An animal ID system should be confidential and not create an additional burden and recognize that the original owner has no control over the animal once it leaves his farm.

During the last state legislative session, Wisconsin became the first state to pass a livestock premises registration bill requiring farmers and others to register locations where livestock is kept. The Wisconsin Department of Ag, Trade, and Consumer Protection is required to assign a premise code for each location and maintain a confidential database of this information. We strongly

supported that legislation and are now involved in the rulemaking process.

With respect to national animal ID programs, we support the trace back of animals within a 48-hour period to assure consumers that the government and the livestock industry will respond quickly to any disease outbreaks in order to stop the spread of disease. The national ID program should focus on food safety and animal health and not on marketing livestock.

The success of the entire program depends on how easy it is for livestock producers to comply with the rules and regulations that are in place. While the individual animal ID program is voluntary, it will eventually become, in effect, mandatory, because of the pressures throughout the marketing channels for assurance that livestock at a premise--have a premise or individual animal ID number.

Wisconsin Farm Bureau has several concepts and concerns for the development and implementation of an animal ID program, and those are included in the rest of my remarks that will be submitted in print form. So, in closing, I would like to reiterate that Wisconsin Farm Bureau supports the establishment and implementation of a national ID program capable of providing support for animal disease control and eradication, as well as enhancing food safety. Any such program must protect producers from liability after livestock leaves the producers' hands, including useless suits naming everyone who handled particular livestock. The program should ensure the

security of producer information and respect the privacy of producers by only collecting data necessary to establish a trace back system. Thank you.

MS. THORNHILL: Thank you. Ken Olson.

MR. OLSON: Good afternoon. My name is Ken Olson. I'm appearing today on behalf of the National Dairy Herd Improvement Association. I'd like to share a bit of my experience as the basis for my comments and also provide some insights into why I believe it's important that we move forward rapidly with an identification effort. As Valerie noted, I'm the immediate past chairman of the National Institute for Animal Agriculture that helped to originally develop and move forward the National Animal Identification System, through development of the USAIP.

Through the years, I've also had the opportunity to work with APHIS on a number of efforts that really relate to this as well. One was development of the emergency action plan for bovine tuberculosis; the other one was the development of a BSE response plan, and in also serving as part of the U.S. team in a test exercise with foot-and-mouth disease in Mexico along with Canada. I've also been a part of the National Animal Health Emergency Management Steering Committee over the years that has worked in this area. A common thread, a common concern that's apparent to all these activities was the realization we do not have in place in this country an animal identification system that's adequate to effectively deal with animal disease outbreaks, be it a

foreign animal disease or an emerging disease.

I've also had the opportunity to be part of APHIS teams working in Mexico evaluating the TB programs there for movement of animals, and so we know that in Mexico they're required to have an animal identification system in place that allows trace back to the farm of origin if they're gonna move animals in the U.S. Likewise, Canada has implemented a system. So our neighbors are putting this to work.

That is why DHI strongly supports the development and rapid implementation of a National Animal Identification System. We feel it's critical to the future of animal agriculture. As I said earlier, we need a system that works. We also want to make it work with a minimum of disruption to existing systems. As we look at implementing the National Animal Identification System, I strongly would urge you to make full use of the voluntary producer-led system that's been in use for nearly 100 years that already collects much of the information that's needed by the system. The Dairy Herd Improvement Program offers this.

A couple of other things that are inside my written comments is that we encourage you to finalize those standards so we can begin to work in the area. National DHI is ready to move forward with this.

Also, to work effectively, we need to have cooperation of the industry, so we urge you to assure that we have adequate representation of actual

producers in the oversight and evaluation of the system as it's implemented.

To summarize, National DHI is very supportive of the system moving forward and working with you on it. Thank you for allowing me to share these comments, and we look forward to working with you.

MS. THORNHILL: Barbara.

MS. KOWALCYK: Good afternoon. My name is Barbara Kowalczyk, and I represent Safe Tables Our Priority, a victim-based group whose mission is to reduce suffering, illness, and death from foodborne disease.

I'm here to tell you that what you are doing today is critically important. Americans desperately need an animal identification system that includes the purpose of protecting public health. Thousands of people are being harmed because our food is not safe enough. Food safety affects all Americans, but most especially our children. I would like to tell you about one child, my child, and the impact foodborne illness has had on my family and my community.

My family's nightmare began on July 31st, 2001, when my son Kevin awoke with diarrhea and mild fever. On the evening of August 1st, we took him to the emergency room for bloody diarrhea but were sent home. By the next morning, Kevin was much sicker and was hospitalized for dehydration and bloody stools. Later that afternoon, we were given the diagnosis: e. coli 0157:H7.

On August 3rd, Kevin's kidneys started failing. He had developed the

dreaded hemolytic uremic syndrome, or HUS. Late that night, he was transferred to the pediatric ICU at University of Wisconsin's Children's Hospital. My husband and I spent the next eight days living in that hospital watching our beautiful son slip away from us. On Tuesday, August 7th, Kevin was placed on a ventilator and continuous dialysis. In hopes of preventing Kevin from remembering this horrible ordeal, doctors heavily sedated him. As the medication would wear off, Kevin would try to pull the tubes out, so braces were put on his arms.

His body began to swell. Doctors inserted tubes to drain fluid off both of his lungs. By the end of the week, he was receiving more medications than we could count to stabilize his blood pressure and heart rate. He had received eight units of blood. A special bed was ordered to alleviate some of his pain. But through it all, the hospital staff remained optimistic. But for Kevin, all of this was not enough, and finally on August 11th at 8:20 p.m., after being resuscitated twice, as doctors were attempting to put him on a heart and lung machine, our beloved Kevin died. He was only two years, eight months, and one day old.

I find it difficult to come before you today to tell you about the death of my son. Kevin was a wonderful little boy who died a horrific death. But as tragic as Kevin's story is, he's not alone. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 325,000 Americans are hospitalized and 5,000 die each year from foodborne illness. Children, the elderly, pregnant and

postpartum women, and individuals with compromised immune systems are at highest risk of developing complications from foodborne illness.

In May, 2001, USDA's Economic Research Service estimated that the five top foodborne illnesses cost 6.9 billion in medical costs, lost productivity, and premature deaths each year in the United States. About one-third of this cost is associated with children. Foodborne illness is more than a bad tummy ache; it is a serious public health problem that needs to be addressed.

On behalf of Kevin, my family, and all victims of foodborne disease, I urge Congress and the USDA to take this next step in fighting foodborne illness. Thank you.

MR. PECK: Hello. My name is John Peck. I'm here with Family Farm Defenders, which is a national group based in Madison. I actually grew up on a farm not far west from St. Cloud, where you'll be tomorrow, but I'm not sure whether my folks will be at that hearing or not. I'm here to offer some comments on this legislation, and I also share the previous comments from some of the other folks about I believe this to be a food safety issue, not just how we make the most money issue. We need to keep--be aware of that at all times.

I'd also like to say that our group's very concerned that the best way to deal with this in a lot of ways would be country of origin labeling, and we're very sorry that this has been held up in Congress and is not being moved forward as part of the Farm Bill. If we knew where our food comes from, a lot

of these issues would have been dealt with and consumers would have the right to choose whether or not to be buying food from countries where there is disease outbreaks happening.

Sixty countries around the world already have country of origin labeling, and our country is not one of them. The mad cow outbreak which we're dealing with in North America is partly due to reckless free trade policies. We imported a million cows from Mexico, 1.7 million cows from Canada in 2003 alone. Where are these animals now? I know where some of them are in this state, because I've seen some of these large-scale mega dairy farms that burn out their animals so fast they have to import from overseas.

Why don't they have a passport? My European friends ask me that all the time. Why don't our animals have passports? I have to do more paperwork to bring in a horse from Iceland than it takes to get a dairy cow in here. It's just amazing how we don't have a national tracking system. Brazil is the largest beef exporter in the world. They have a national livestock tracking system. Why don't we yet? You know, we're really behind the times.

I guess I'm hoping that when this system is implemented we don't have a huge bloated bureaucracy that goes along with it. We have a lot of very creative, innovative existing systems already in place. The Federal government would do best to combine and coordinate those than come up with a huge new bureaucracy. We don't need to recreate the wheel.

I'm also concerned about--I understand the interest in having a uniform system that everyone can understand the rules, but at the same time very concerned about the USDA creating a ceiling on safety and testing when it should be setting a floor. If states or individual producers want to do tougher tracking or tougher testing, that should be their prerogative, especially if that means our food system is safer and better. If Wisconsin producers, for instance, want to do comprehensive testing of all their animals for mad cow so they can get that Japanese market back, they should be allowed to do that. USDA should not be blocking those types of things from happening.

I'm also concerned that we should be tracking animal feed, not just live animals. Anyone who's taken a microbiology class knows that diseases aren't just spread by live animals. If we have contaminated feed coming in from Canada, which it has come in with ruminant byproducts, if we are sending contaminated feed to Europe, which it has with ruminant byproducts, we need to track it down as well.

I'd also hope the system is not privatized, that it remains in the public interest, run by taxpayers for the benefit of taxpayers. And once again, I hope that country of origin labeling is on this somewhere because if I know where my clothes come from, why can't I know where my meat comes from? Thank you.

MS. THORNHILL: The next five people to speak are John Kinsman, George Roemer, Jack Banker, David Matthes, and Angie Ulness.

MR. KINSMAN: Good afternoon. My name is John Kinsman. I'm a dairy farmer from Sauk County, Wisconsin, and I milked my cows very early this morning to get here. I'm also the vice president of the National Family Farm Coalition based in Washington, D.C. We work with 35 farm groups throughout the United States on issues such as the ID system, and we work internationally.

The past couple of decades I've talked in dozens of countries across the world, and I spent some time in England and also had our English friends come back and come here, and they are horrified that we did not learn from their experiences with the mad cow disease, which they covered up for 10 years, and now see that we are doing the same thing here and not taking the precautions necessary.

So I think we need, along with the ID tracking system, we need to do the preventative things that they see we are not doing, such as the still feeding of ruminants back to ruminants. The press says that we are enforcing that. It's not true. I can go to any feed mill and find blood meal and everything else being sold without any questions, and farmers not even aware of it. Often they are not supposed to be feeding these types of things.

The issue--I want to echo what Dr. John Peck just said and also the woman that lost her son is the food safety issue. And we must be enforcing standards in packing--the meat packing plants that allow all of these

contaminants to happen with not much of an inspection system.

In England, my friends tell me that per capita consumption of beef is now higher than it was per capita than before the BSE and during the BSE scandal and crisis. That is because they have now cleaned up their cows. They have a good system, and I urge the people here to look at their system and take the best parts of that to see what does work. And they cannot sell an animal--a packing plant cannot accept an animal that has any manure or dirt on it, for instance, so the animals are processed that are clean and the consumers have great confidence now in the beef, and we need to do that here. The rest of the world knows what goes on here, and that's one of the reasons those bans are still in effect of us not able to sell our beef overseas.

The cost of this ID system, of course, should be with the public, because this is a public health issue. And I also want to stress the importance of country of origin labeling. With the trade issues, the free trade, the WTO, and especially with NAFTA, we cannot inspect properly animal or animal products that come into this country. They can only--the inspectors, I'm saying, can only look into the back of a truck. They cannot even climb in the truck and see what's there. And we need to look at these so-called Free Trade laws and make something different happen as far as inspection and a lot of these things.

And the final thing, I think we should learn from Dr. Richard Myers, who is now deceased but did a lot of work on the animal BSE thing and learn

from him what we should not do. Thank you.

MR. ROEMER: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. My name is George Roemer. I'm a third-generation dairy farmer from the township of Rubicon in Dodge County, Wisconsin. I'm here today representing Equity Cooperative Livestock Sales Association, on whose board of directors I've served for the past six years. Equity currently operates 12 markets, livestock auction markets, in the state of Wisconsin and one in Iowa. We have approximately 45,000 members. Last year we marketed a little over 1 million animals in four states and six major species.

I further represent Equity to the National Council Farmers Cooperatives in Washington, D.C. and as such have been active with that in the livestock subcommittee, and where we have discussed this in conjunction with another association you folks have probably heard of called the National Livestock Producers Association, which has a little over 200,000 members and operates 22 markets around the country.

I will confirm Mr. Hawks' comments that, yes, we are concerned about confidentiality, who has access to the data that will be collected. We are concerned about cost. The estimated cost to our markets through a study that we've done is about \$45,000 a market.

The other question that I would ask is, if we were to tag all animals, will they become like motor cars? If some of you recall, all motor cars at one time

did not have a vehicle identification number. What happened to motor cars when they got a vehicle identification number? The price went up. Does identifying all of the animals make them a value-added product, and, if so, shouldn't the price go up, because that's the American way, isn't it?

The other question is consistency. The system was devised, and it looks like we're well on track to that, is it should be the same from state to state. Equity has a market in Waukon, Iowa, as I mentioned, that takes animals from Wisconsin. We have to have similarities between the systems. We have a market in Monroe, Wisconsin, that takes a lot of animals from Illinois. We need the consistency there to be able to read the same tag.

Also, the timeline is important, and we need adequate time for compliance. A further question I have is, will the USAIP be legislated or will it be something that the USDA can do? When we were in Washington this summer, we learned that there are seven bills in the U.S. Congress proposed by different people from different states that would affect the legislation. We need to sort those out. Perhaps some of those folks need to know what the rules are.

Also, we at Equity are part of one of the pilot projects, and I would ask that you would please allow us time to conduct those projects, allow us time to find out how they would work, and sometimes the problems are gonna be difficult, sometimes they will be easy, but we appreciate the time to speak to you, and please try to answer our questions when you can. Thank you.

MR. BANKER: Hello. My name is Jack Banker. My wife and I, together with our son, his wife, and their two children, own and operate Banker's Farm. We specialize in the care and raising of dairy replacement heifers in northeast Wisconsin. Presently we raise about 7,800 heifers for ten different local dairy producers in the Fox Valley area. I am also a past president of Fox Valley DHIA, which is now a division of Northstar Cooperative, a DHIA service unit that is a member of national DHIA.

Northstar Cooperative offers DHI services to over 1,500 dairy producers in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio. Also, I am a member of the Northstar Cooperative DHI advisory--or services advisory board, for the Professional Dairy Heifer Growers Association, U.S. 4-H Council, and chairperson of the central office of national DHIA. I also serve on the advisory board for three agriculture courses taught here at Fox Valley Technical College.

In my opinion, as a longtime dairy producer and a lifetime advocate of supplying customers with quality product, we have never, in the history of agriculture, been faced with a more challenging and compelling reason to secure a safety net for the production and distribution of our product. I am pleased to be able to share a few ideas about a proposed national ID system with you on behalf of our producer members that I represent.

First, I want to state that Northstar Cooperative and the national DHIA strongly support the development and rapid implementation of a National

Animal ID System. The system is critical to the future of agriculture as we address some of the health issues. Having a system in place that will allow a complete trace back within 48 hours of finding a foreign animal disease helps protect our animals and our livelihood. Without a national animal ID system, we are at significant risk.

As you move to implement the national animal identification system, I strongly encourage you to use--commit full use of a voluntary, producer-led system that has been in place for nearly 100 years that already collects much of the information needed by the system. The Dairy Herd Improvement system has always relied on individual animal identification as well as herd or premise ID. The system currently maintains records on approximately 4.5 million dairy cows, or about half our national dairy herd. The program operates in every state and has field staff that routinely visits producer members to collect and verify information. This information includes herd or premise information as well as individual animal information, including ID, date of birth, movement in and out of the herd. This means that we have a system in place and are ready to work with you to move the NAIS forward.

In addition, the DHI system has served as the ID tag producer to dairy producers for many years. We are experienced in this and ready to serve the system as an AI manager and distributor. We encourage you to finalize the required standards so that we may begin work in this area.

Thank you for allowing me to share these thoughts on implementation of NAIS with you. We look forward to having a DHI system as a partner in this effort to safeguard the health of our national herd.

MR. MATTHES: Good afternoon. My name is David Matthes, and I serve as the president of the Wisconsin Independent Livestock Dealers Association for the past 16 years. I am here before you today representing our organization's view and concerns on animal identification. The Wisconsin Independent Livestock Dealers are responsible for the movement of a major portion of Wisconsin's livestock, and we're concerned with federal and state plans for animal identification. WILDA is concerned about the United States and Wisconsin's animal health and the ability for disease trace back in an efficient time frame.

I have read and been told that the consumer, both foreign and domestic, won't want our products unless they can be identified in every point of movement from birth to shelf. I've been involved in this industry my entire life, and found out that the true indicator of what the consumer wants is in retail prices, and they've never been higher. We're currently experiencing new record highs in prices of the United States animal and meat products.

We are concerned, like everyone else, about the three major problems of this program: cost, confidentiality, and the technology level being acceptable to all players. We are concerned that this program never runs out of federal and

state funding, becoming a burden to producers or marketers. To do this, we must ensure that the proper legislation in the language we establish from the beginning so that the cost and appropriations are a known figure before we start this program. Right now we're rushing into a program that I feel that there is urgency for, but we also have the cart before the horse.

Confidentiality is our biggest concern. This program shows too much interest from commercial and private interest groups to be comfortable. The only consideration of information gathered should be for animal health only, and we need to guarantee this to our consumers. Although this is the computer age, I think we may be surprised to find out how many people are not up to date with our latest in technologies. If there's gonna be scanners and computer-linked technologies supplied for markets and receiving facilities and plants, it will almost have to be provided to the handlers of livestock also.

Last week I received Allflex's report pertaining to the ID info expo held in Chicago. On the second page of the report, there was a section on animal-- individual animal species ID requirements, under which there were four different groups of livestock, cattle, swine, sheep/goats, and horses. Each of the four had four or five different requirements. Couldn't it be very confusing if you had more than one species of animals with the different requirements?

I think we need to have a more unified system that would work for all of our different proposed animals. Also, I noted that under cattle they suggested

that the receiving premises, or the receiving people, would be solely responsible for the reporting of the animal--of the cattle movements. Our suggestions to the Secretary of Ag would be this: keep it simple and cost-effective. Tag and report at birth and at death. Ninety-nine percent of the producers know when they sold their cattle and the majority of their animals are moved minimally.

The current system will work, but is--the current--the proof that the system will work is that there is an improvement on the current system we have already, and the system that we have has been working for the next few decades.

MS. THORNHILL: Thank you.

MR. MATTHES: Thank you.

MS. ULNESS: Hello. My name is Angie Ulness, and I am a regional field director for the Holstein Association and I am a dairy farmer with my husband in Valders, Wisconsin, where we milk 76 registered Holsteins.

This country's animal agriculture producers, including the Holstein Association USA's 35,000 members, are at risk today with the threats of additional cases of BSE in this country and the threat of foot-and-mouth disease. It is our belief that animal identification for production animal agriculture in this country needs to be mandatory.

Additionally, it cannot be technology neutral. The RFID, or radio frequency ID technology, is the most accurate, efficient, and cost-effective form of animal ID used in the world today and will likely be for many years to come.

Without a mandatory national animal identification program in this country, we will continue to be denied market access in certain countries throughout the world. Currently, 58 countries have banned U.S. beef since BSE was identified in Washington State late last year.

The National FAIR, Farm Animal Identification and Records Program, which is coordinated by the Holstein Association, is an animal ID and traceability program in place and working today that incorporates RFID tags. The National FAIR program provides each animal with a unique identification number. Similar to a Social Security number or a car's vehicle identification number, the number stays with the animal for its lifetime.

The Holstein Association USA has worked cooperatively with USDA APHIS and Veterinary Services since 1999 to design, develop, and demonstrate a pilot project for a national livestock identification program that will trace livestock from farm to farm, farm to market, and market to processing unit. The goal has been accomplished, as the National FAIR program has been identifying and tracing animals from birth to slaughter for several years.

The National FAIR program has an infrastructure already in place consisting of a comprehensive database, a dedicated data provider, and a coordinated field service staff.

The National FAIR program was developed by producers, for producers. Currently there are well over 1.3 million animals in the National FAIR database.

Information stored securely in the FAIR system includes where and when the animal was born, what locations the animal has been at, such as farms, markets, or processing units, what livestock the animal has been in contact with, and eventually where and when the animal was slaughtered.

The information on the National FAIR database allows for the tracing of an animal's movements from birth to slaughter in as little as a few minutes. As part of this system, tag readers designed to read electronic tags are already in place in markets and processing facilities throughout the United States.

Now is not the time to reinvent the wheel. National Animal Identification needs to be implemented in the United States today. Thank you.

MS. THORNHILL: The last two people that we have scheduled to speak are Gary Tauchen and Joe Drexler.

MR. DREXLER: Good afternoon. My name is Joe Drexler. I'm a field service manager for Fox Valley DHI, which is a division of Northstar Cooperative, and of national DHI. Northstar Cooperative offers DHI services to over 1,500 dairy producers in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio, utilizing approximately 60 field technicians. Northstar Cooperative is a stock-based cooperative owned by dairy and beef producers and is also a marketing arm for the artificial insemination firm Select Sires that is headquartered in Plain City, Ohio.

Northstar Cooperative markets Select Sires semen and products in

northern Wisconsin, all of Michigan, and northern Indiana. In addition to the 1,500 DHI groups, Northstar Cooperative also actively calls on another 4,700 dairy and beef producers in three states. I'm pleased to be able to share a few ideas with you about the proposed national ID system on behalf of our producers and stock owners that I represent.

First I want to assure you that Northstar Cooperative strongly supports the development and rapid implementation of a National ID System. Animal ID is critical to the future of animal agriculture in the United States, as we address animal health issues. Having an ID system in place that will allow complete trace back within 48 hours, the finding of foreign animal disease, helps protect our animals, our marketplace, and our livelihood.

Without a national ID system we are at significant risk. As you implement a National Identification System we encourage you to make full use of a voluntary, producer-led system that has been in place for 100 years. The DHI improvement system has always relied on individual animal identification as well as herd ID. The current system maintains records on about four and a half million animal, which is about half of our national dairy herd presently. The program operates in every state and has a field staff that routinely visits and collects information from its member herds. The information includes herd and premise ID as well as individual animal identification. The information includes birth date and animal movement both in and out of the herds.

We recognize that producers have concerns over confidentiality, and we realize it's a valid concern, and it has been our experience that we've been able to effectively share information without putting producers or that information at risk.

MS. THORNHILL: Thank you.

MR. DREXLER: Thank you.

MR. TAUCHEN: Good afternoon. My name is Gary Tauchen. I'm a dairy producer from Bonneville, Wisconsin, and service chairman from Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium. I appreciate the opportunity to testify at the listening session this afternoon.

The most urgent need in the livestock industry is to protect the health of the national livestock herds. The livestock industry worked two and a half years to develop the United States Animal Identification Plan, which defines the standards and framework for implementing and maintaining the national identification system for the U.S. and is now known as the National Animal Identification System. The process of developing this system was cooperative in the true sense of the word. WLIC appreciated the opportunity to provide input and direction in the process and work cooperatively to resolve complex issues.

I'd like to thank USDA APHIS Veterinary Service, especially Dr. John Wiemers and Dr. Valerie Ragan, for their past and continued support of WLIC. Working to develop a system cooperatively will positively affect and be a model

of future cooperation and working relationships throughout the nation. An animal tracking system needs to identify each production unit and location participating in commerce. This location is referred to as premises ID. The national plan recognizes the responsibility of administering premises location lies with each state.

Premises registration is the foundation upon which the national ID system will be built. WLIC is working with DATCP to develop the premises and interstate tracking system. We've also worked closely with USDA APHIS and Veterinary Services, who provided WLIC with grant money. To have a national system that meets the 48-hour trace back rule, it's critical premises registration be mandatory. Wisconsin's past legislation mandating premises registration by November of 2005 without mandatory registration not only is money wasted but there's no real protection. A voluntary system is useful while the system and infrastructure are being built, but will need to become mandatory at some point.

A uniform premises and animal tracking system assures producers the regulatory needs of managing disease outbreaks can be met. Recent animal health issues, such as foot-and-mouth in Europe and BSE in Canada and Washington State have shown how vulnerable animal agriculture can be. A National Animal ID System will not prevent the introduction of a disease but it will allow health officials to more quickly contain the disease. As a result,

normal commerce can be more quickly restored, benefiting both producers and consumers.

The state responsibility of premises registration and maintaining premises databases requires ongoing state funding to establish the infrastructure and maintain staff to collect information. Animal identification is important in several areas, including animal health, trade, market access, food safety, and homeland security. Animal health has been driving the national plan. It could be argued that the BSE case has pushed animal identification into the consumer arena.

MS. THORNHILL: Thank you.

MR. TAUCHEN: Thank you.

(Additional comments were made by Mr. Hawks and Dr. Ragan, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.)